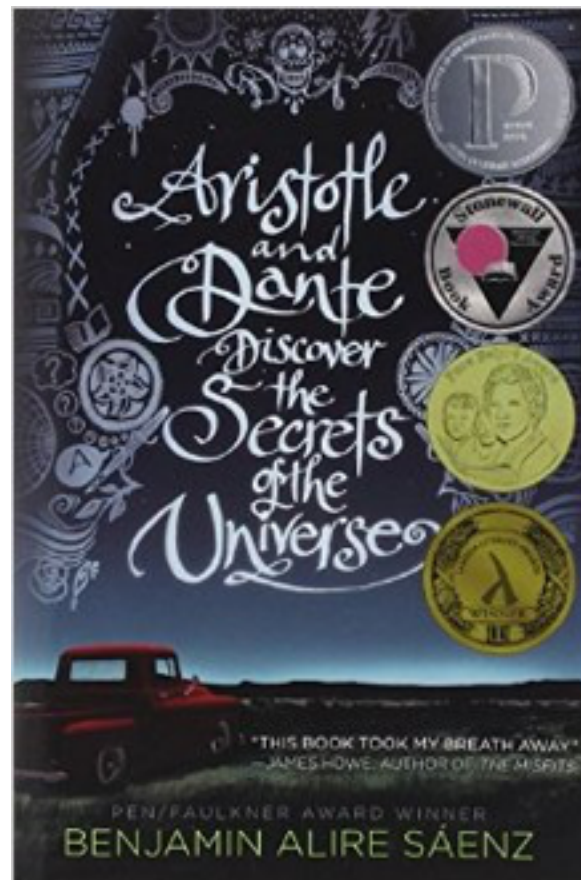


ARISTOTLE AND DANTE

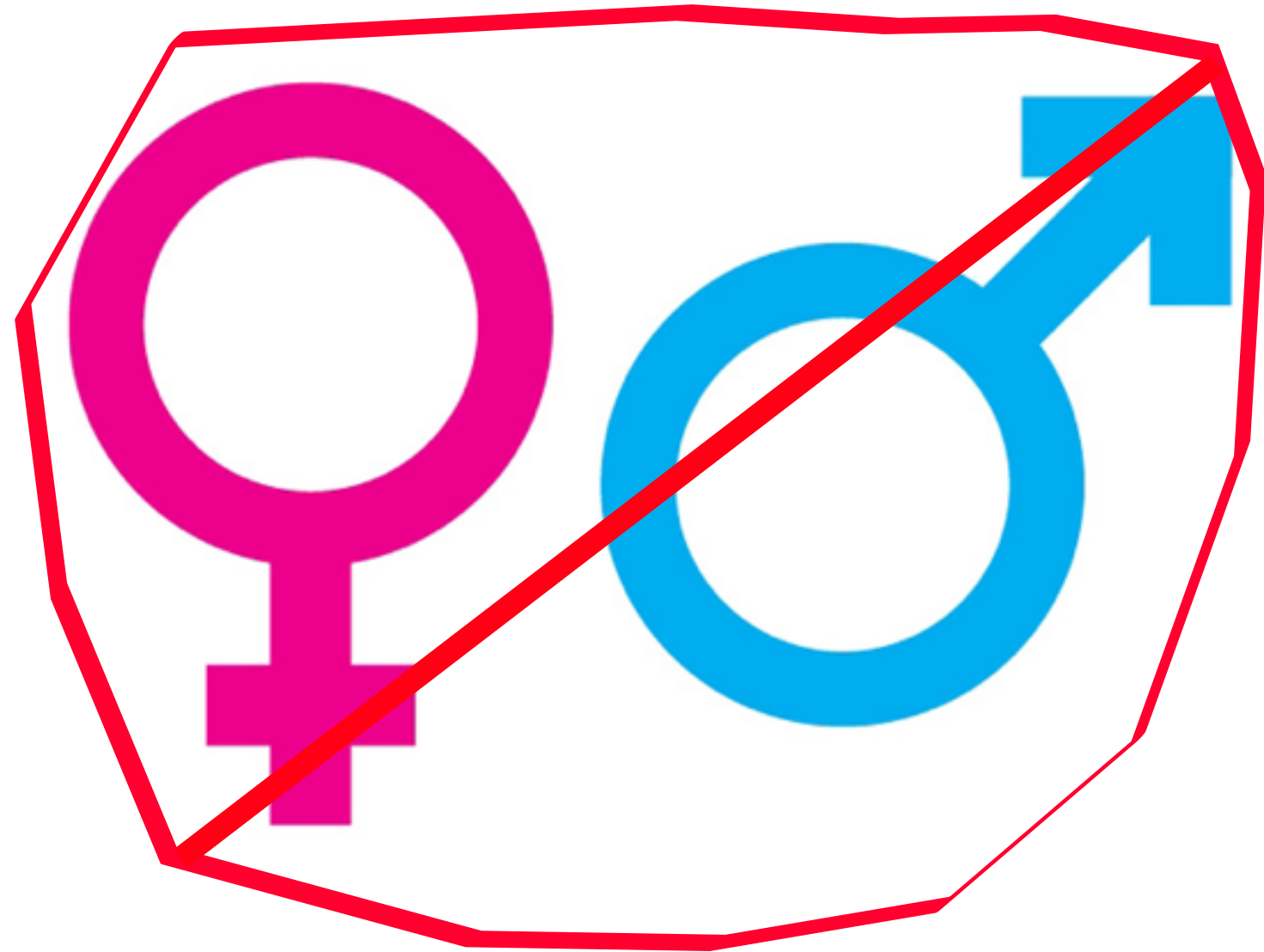
THE SCHOLASTIC REVIEW



Review By: Brandon Becker

Central Idea: Gender Roles and Sexual Identity

Gender roles and sexual orientation has been a topic for strong debate since the beginning of time. Many people still find it hard to fight strict grip of society's stereotypes on how men or women should act, or about whom they can love. In *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Universe*, two boys Aristotle Mendoza and Dante Quintana fight with societal and social constraints. Aristotle (Ari) and Dante struggle with the ordinary obstacles of two boys coming of age such as relationships and school. However, Ari has family trouble like his brother being in prison and his distanced relationship with his parents. While Dante deals with moving away to Chicago because his father was offered a new job. Yet, both boys struggle with society, sexual orientation, gender roles and familial expectations.



IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE!

Example 1

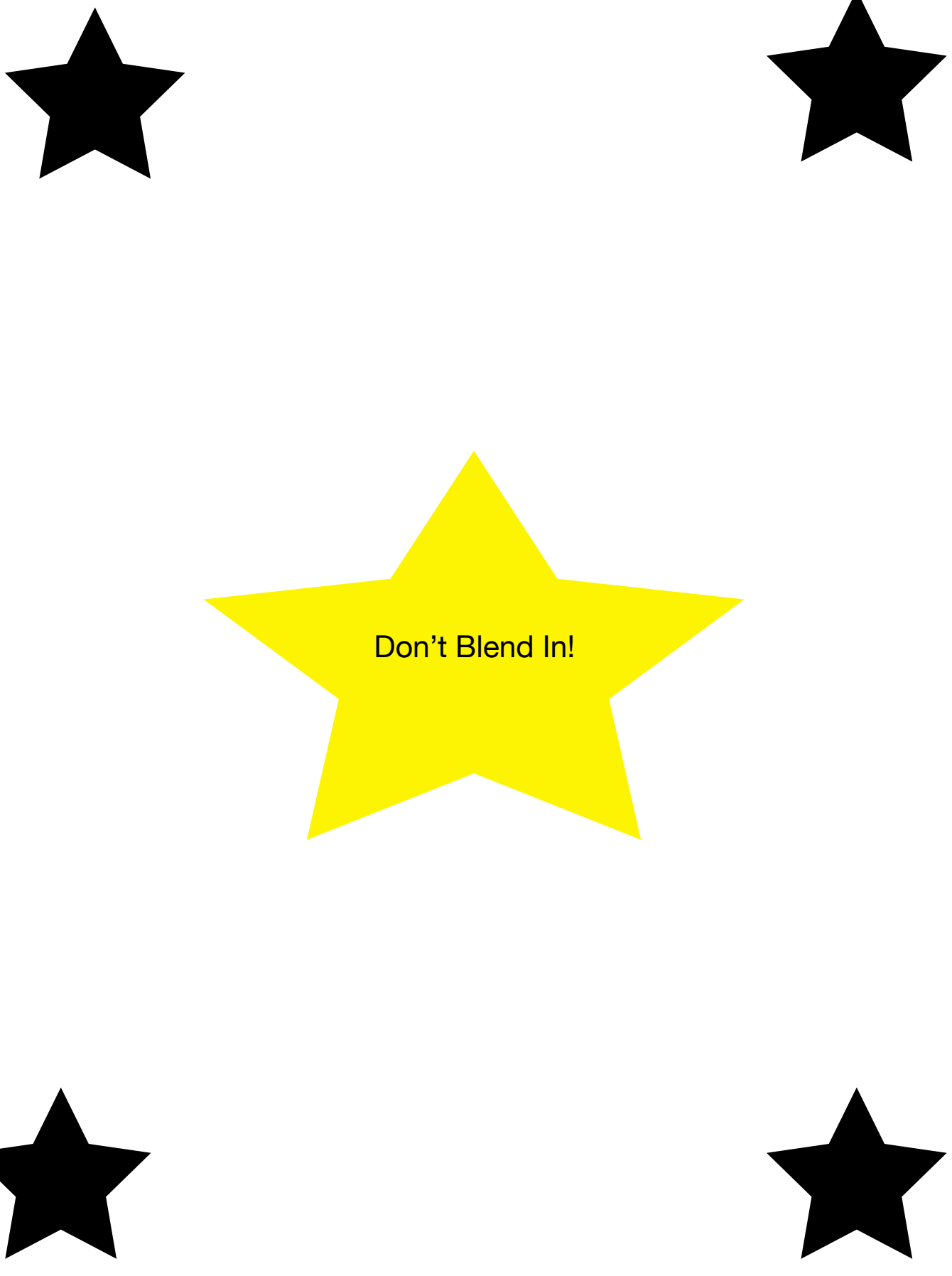
Sketches

In the second portion of the six sections within this novel called: Sparrows Falling From the Sky, Ari contracts an awful case of the flu. Ari's parents nurse him back to help. However, Dante also sticks by his side in a friendly-manner. Yet, he sketches Ari in his book while he sleeps. This is a marker in their relationship because Dante is very secretive of his sketchbook. Of course, this is normal for any teenager, but in this case it is important. Dante refuses to show him the sketch, but leaves a life-like drawing of a chair instead. I think this symbolizes how important his sketches of Ari are to him and how he fears Ari might not feel comfortable being drawn while asleep.

Furthermore, in the third section called, The End of Summer, Ari was hit by a car when saving Dante. Dante, feeling extremely guilty and emotionally drawn out, tries to give Ari his sketchbook. Ari, juggling with emotions as a growing, young boy, becomes irritated and doesn't want to appear weak so he throws the figurative piece of Dante's heart at the wall, refusing to look at it.

"Masculinity" seems to be the main problem these two boys face in these instances.





Example 2 Coming of Age

In the fourth section, Letters on a Page, Ari gets a 1957 Chevy pick-up truck just as his casts come off. He becomes infatuated with a girl. On the other hand, Dante sends Ari letters from Chicago telling him all about his escapades of going to parties, trying marijuana, drinking alcohol, and kissing girls. However, he admits to Ari later in their letter responses that he would rather be kissing boys than girls. This admission is key in hinting that Dante still likes Ari more than anything else he happens to be into in Chicago. Dante reveals in his letters that he fears what his parents will think or say if they find out he likes boys.

These letters are similar to journal entries someone may write in a diary and it is amazing that Dante feels that comfortable with Ari to share his true feelings. However, Ari still tries to beat himself into the stereotypical, manly mold by lifting weights, ignoring his feelings, getting drunk and generally avoiding his mental state.

It is typical to avoid your inner instincts when societal norms come bashing down your front door. However, I feel Ari would benefit not just physically, but also mentally by being true to himself like Dante. Even if Dante doesn't know what he feels, he is letting himself feel it.

Don't Blend In!

Example 3

Ari's Struggle

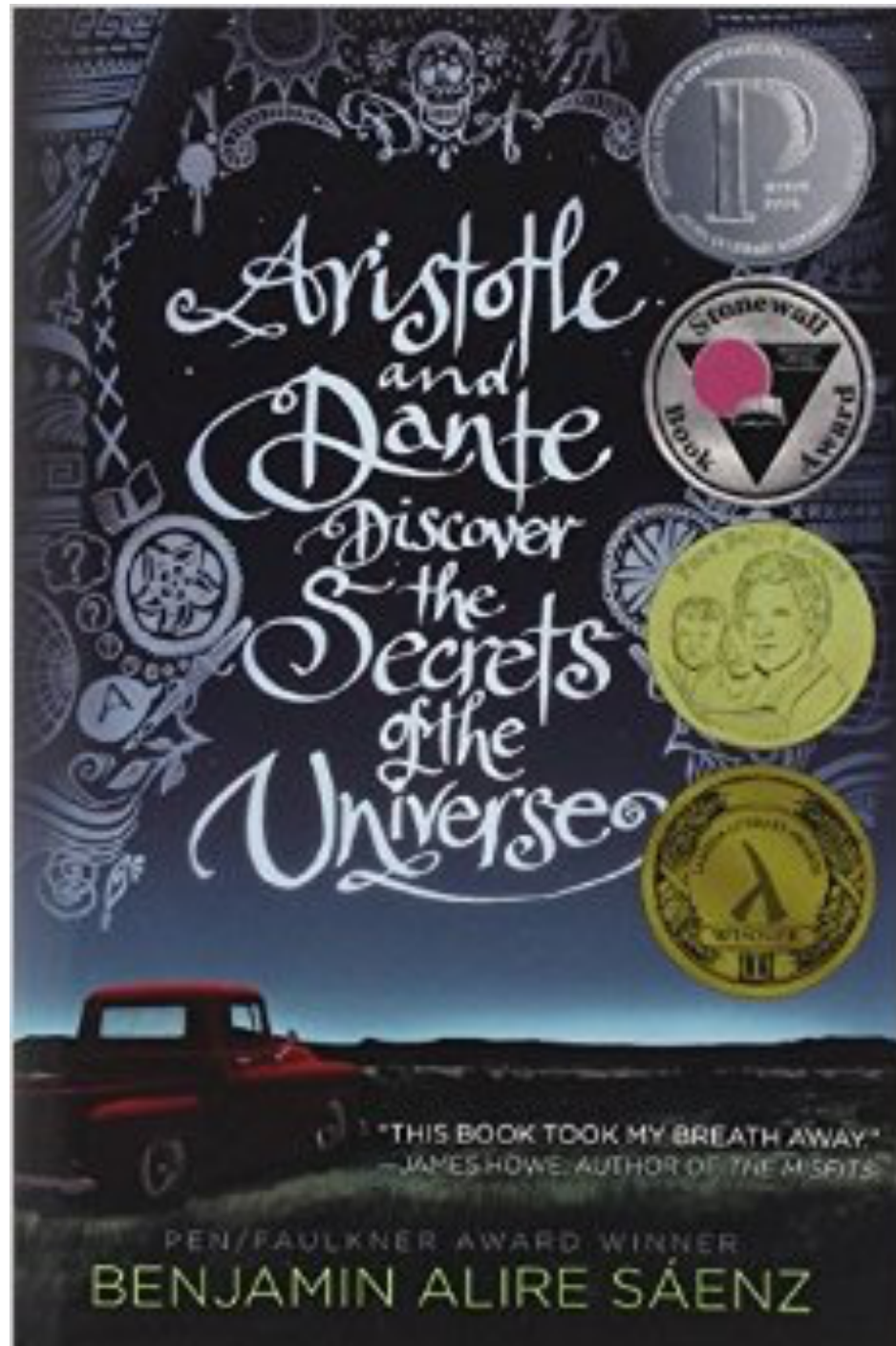
One night, in the section, Remember the Rain, Dante asks Ari to kiss him, saying he just wants to experiment as he has never kissed another boy. Ari agrees reluctantly, so Dante kisses him, with Ari reciprocating slightly. Afterwards, Ari claims to have felt nothing between them. Dante is quite upset because he seemed to have felt something, which confirms that Dante has feelings for Ari. After the experience, Dante seems to make clear his intentions while Ari appears to not feel the same way for Dante. This struggling of emotions is clear for both parties for different reasons. Dante wants acceptance and Ari wants to discover himself, but he is clearly reluctant to do so because of social norms.

In the same section, Ari attends his Aunt Ophelia's funeral, where his extended family had estranged her because of her sexual preferences. Being lesbian apparently was reason enough not to attend her funeral. This angers Ari's parents, because that is not a reasonable justification for not attending a loved one's funeral. This is important because it reveals that Ari's parents don't care about sexual orientation or gender roles.



Review of Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe:

<https://youtu.be/T-tJmRdCIN0>



Example 4

Beliefs

In the summation section of this novel: All Secrets of the Universe, Dante ends up getting jumped while kissing a boy named Daniel, who he wished was Ari. When Ari finds out, he hunts down the boys and beats up one of them (Julian), at work. Ari's father defends him and his mother actually understands where he is coming from. Rather than acting like his older brother, who murdered someone for his backwards beliefs, Ari stood up for Dante who he actually loves. Ari doesn't understand what his parents seem to get.

After Ari explains his parents what had happened to Dante, his family has a meeting and his father convinces him to stop running from who he is. His father opens up to him so Ari can open up in turn. This moment is the reason why Ari and Dante's families get together and go bowling, to allow their sons to be together, finally understanding one another. They kiss, fully recognizing and embracing their sexualities. This final portion of the novel sums up how hard it is for teenagers to break down these social norms and end all of the ignorant, strict gender roles that hinder emotional growth.

Citations

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